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ABSTRACT

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is giving 82 public schools around the state a chance to show what they can do to improve student achievement through reduced state regulation and increased flexibility. The project referred to as the Partnership Schools Initiative teams local school campuses with regional education services and the TEA for a 3-5 year period. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the faculty and administrators of Bean Elementary School in Lubbock decided to experiment with a voluntary professional growth program designed to replace mandated teacher evaluations for most teachers. This program used peer coaching and collegial support teams (CSTs). Twelve CSTs of classroom and support teachers were organized. Each team member was required to develop a teacher professional development contract, which included the teacher's goals for professional growth. At the end of the 1992-93 school year, a formal evaluation of each CST was conducted by the principal. Although the full import on student achievement is not yet known, the first year of using CSTs for professional growth was very successful as perceived by both teachers and administrators. Some selected references and resources used in planning and operating the program along with samples of teacher professional development contracts are provided. (LL)

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Collegial Support Teams Replace Teacher Evaluations In A Partnership School

ED 367 654

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Association of Teacher Educators, Atlanta, Georgia, February 12-16, 1994.

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ABSTRACT

An elementary school implements a successful voluntary teacher professional growth program using collegial support teams and peer coaching with the objectives to enhance teacher professional growth and to improve student achievement. The program was used in a Texas Education Agency partnership school in lieu of traditional mandated teacher evaluations. The collegial support teams had the option of inviting faculty members from local universities to serve on their teams, which proved to be an excellent means for continuing professional development for university faculty.

Collegial Support Teams Enhance Professional Development In A Partnership School

The Texas Education Agency (TEA) is giving 82 public schools around the state, including Bean Elementary School in Lubbock, a chance to show what they can do to improve student achievement through reduced state regulation and increased flexibility. The project is formally referred to as the Partnership Schools Initiative (PSI) and was started with the 1991-92 school year. This project teams local school campuses with regional education service centers and the TEA for a three to five-year period. The goal of the PSI is to eliminate the barriers to improved student achievement and to close the performance gap that currently exists among the various student populations. The basic belief of the PSI is that: when given maximum opportunity, including relief from rules and regulations, and when provided professional and fiscal support from the Central Education Agency as needed, a school will put into place a program that will lead to improved performance of all students.

Accepting this basic belief and taking advantage of the opportunity for less regulation and increased flexibility, the faculty and administrators of Bean Elementary School decided to experiment with a different type of a staff development program designed specifically to address their most pressing educational concern. As in many other schools in Texas, this pressing concern is improved student achievement as measured by the current mandated statewide student testing program. The testing program implemented by the Texas Education Agency for the period 1990-1995 is the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). In addition to measuring skills in reading, writing, and mathematics, this new assessment both extends and expands previous statewide tests, broadening the scope of content eligible for

testing and emphasizing skill areas that improve a student's ability to think independently, read critically, write clearly, and solve problems logically in a real-world context. The new staff development program, a voluntary professional growth program, was designed to replace state mandated teacher evaluations for most teachers.

Bean Elementary School serves approximately 635 students (preschool to grade 6) with the majority being minority, has 45 regular classroom teachers and two administrators. The school requested and received a waiver from the TEA concerning teacher evaluations as required by the Texas Teacher Appraisal System (TTAS) beginning with the 1992-93 school year. Bean was one of three schools in the state to receive such a waiver. In lieu of teacher evaluations as required by the TTAS, a voluntary professional development program was designed using Collegial Support Teams (CST) and peer coaching.

Planning and Implementing the Professional Growth Program

Looking for a sound theoretical base, the administrators and teachers reviewed the literature concerning various topics such as staff development, collegial learning, coaching of teaching, conditions needed for professional growth, problem-solving strategies, clinical supervision, and peer coaching. Most of the teachers believed that they could learn and become empowered to directly affect their professional growth. They believed they could develop a program that would enhance their professional growth and that would ultimately affect student performance.

Bean's new professional growth program was designed using the concept of peer coaching and Collegial Support Teams. Peer coaching is described as "the process where teams of teachers regularly observe one another and provide support, companionship,

feedback, and assistance" (Valencia & Killion, 1988). According to Ackland, three characteristics have become common to all peer coaching programs which are (a) nonevaluative, (b) based on the observation of classroom teaching followed by constructive feedback, and (c) aimed to improve instructional technique. Also, current research on peer coaching suggests it is a viable means to provide ongoing supervision, decrease teacher isolation, and encourage greater collaboration within schools (Hosack-Curlin, 1993).

To establish their unique professional growth program using peer coaching, the faculty was c ganized into Collegial Support Teams (CSTs). Classroom teachers as well as support teachers (i.e., music, art, physical education, computer and librarians) were assigned to a CST with the understanding they had the option of continuing to use the teacher evaluation prescribed by TTAS or using the evaluation designed into each CST (i.e. completing their professional development contract). An exception to this option were the first-year teachers and teachers new to the state of Texas who were required to be evaluated with the traditional appraisal system model.

Twelve Collegial Support Teams were organized. Each member of the team was required to develop a Teacher Professional Development Contract (samples are included in attachment), which included the identification of his/her goals for professional growth for the year. The goals had to be supported by research as to the possible effect on student achievement, be directly related to overall goals of the school, and include at least one objective from the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills test at each grade level. Some guidelines for organizing and operating the teams included:

1. The CST will consist of the following members:
   a. Two to four teachers with like goals (across grade level)
   b. Facilitator or other members from the faculty (selected by the team)
   c. The principal and assistant principal
   d. A qualified person outside of the faculty (such as a university faculty member)
2. Each CST should select a chairperson/leader and a recorder.
3. Each CST should plan on meeting at least twice monthly on Mondays immediately after school. The recorder should forward a copy of the minutes to the principal monthly.
4. Training in peer coaching techniques will be available upon request.
5. Each team member should plan to observe in each teacher's classroom at least monthly and provide feedback to the teacher.
6. A permanent substitute teacher will be assigned to the building with the primary responsibility of covering classrooms of teachers who are participating in CST activities.
7. For the teachers opting for the CST evaluation model, the Teacher Professional Development Contract must be completed not later than within the last two weeks of the school year. The team, including the principal or assistant principal, will meet and determine if the contract has been satisfactorily completed. Teachers will be required to provide documentation such as portfolios, videotapes, or other products deemed appropriate as an accurate

measure of growth of student achievement. For teachers satisfactorily completing their contract, 184 TTAS points will be credited, which is the equivalent of a perfect TTAS appraisal.

8. At the end of the school year, all teachers who opted for CST evaluation will be responsible for displaying their products (documentation such as portfolios, videotapes or other student work as a measure of student growth) in the library. These materials will be available for review and comment by the entire faculty.

Assessment Of The First Year

At the end of the 1992-93 school year, a formal evaluation of each Collegial Support Team was conducted by the principal. The first part of the meeting consisted of each team member presenting her/his materials as related to her/his Professional Development Contract. The final part of the session consisted of processing/reflecting on the team procedure and making recommendations for improvement for next year.

Although the full impact on improved student achievement as measured by the TAAS test is not yet known, the first year of using Collegial Support Teams as a way to enhance teacher professional growth was extremely successful as perceived by both the teachers and administrators. Some observations/comments received were as follows:

- The professional bonding of teachers, especially those working on similar goals, was very rewarding.
- The communication/interaction of teachers from different grade levels was extremely helpful, especially in the process of assisting the students to be better

prepared for the TAAS testing. The need for curriculum alignment in certain areas became obvious.

- Several teachers commented that they didn't realize how much they were working in isolation until they became a member of a CST.
- This collegial, ongoing self-improvement process is certainly not like the one-shot inservice training we usually receive.
- We now understand how we can collaborate to better solve some of our school problems.
- The first year or inexperienced teachers had a much needed and wanted support group.
- The opportunity to visit other classes and to exchange ideas and activities was rewarding.
- We were so pleased to see how teachers in other grade levels were addressing the same subject matter, especially how the instruction related to TAAS objectives.
- We feel like we had an opportunity for professional growth in areas other than TAAS related.
- Serving as a member on the CST required more time and effort than doing a "dog and pony show" for the TTAS, but it was definitely worth it.
- The open and honest communication that developed in our CST was extraordinary.
- We now seem to share a common language as we discuss our school.
- The full-time substitute teacher to cover our classes during the time we visited other classes was invaluable.

- The products displayed in the library by the various teachers at the end of the school year was very helpful to us as we plan for next year.

Although the first year of the Collegial Support Teams was considered successful, it was not without some problems and frustrations experienced both by the teachers and administrators. In an effort to address these problems so as to improve the program for the next school year, the following recommendations were made both by the administrators and teachers which included:

- For teachers opting for the CST appraisal, specific criteria should be developed to determine the minimum level of acceptance of the products presented at the end of the year. Also, this expectation should be presented to the teachers at the beginning of the year.
- Additional and specific training in peer coaching techniques and competencies should be provided at the beginning of the school year. Such training could be planned around Garmston's five nonjudgmental mediational competencies of the coach: (1) questioning skills, (2) paraphrasing, (3) probing for specificity, clarity, elaboration, and precision, (4) using silence/wait time, and (5) collecting data and presenting it objectively.
- A full-time substitute teacher should continue to be available to cover classes for teachers while they are observing other classes.
- The planning and scheduling of the Collegial Support Teams should start during the first week of school or earlier.

- Our professional library should be expanded to include current literature on peer coaching.
- Specific guidelines should be developed to assist teachers to evaluate and document their own professional growth.
- Administrators should continue to use traditional appraisals on all teachers new to our campus in order to familiarize themselves with teachers' competencies before releasing them to CST evaluations.
- Some of the important findings reported from the CSTs should be translated into school goals. For example, curriculum alignment in certain areas would definitely improve student achievement in the TAAS testing program.

Most of the previously stated recommendations were incorporated into the 1993-94 program. Some selected references and resources used in planning and operating the program are presented on the following pages.

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ATTACHMENT

(Samples of Teacher Professional Development Contracts)

BEAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
3001 Ave. N
Lubbock, Texas 79405

_____ **K-6 Chapter**
TEACHER NAME GRADE LEVEL

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT CONTRACT

OUTCOME:

Students will show growth in Language Arts through the improvement of reading comprehension and written communication.

TAAS OBJECTIVES:

1. The student will determine the meaning of words in a variety of written texts.
2. The student will respond appropriately in a written composition to the purpose/audience specified in a given topic.

PLAN:

1. Through the use of Conflict Resolution strategies and Student Council activities, students will be able to define and use related vocabulary in a variety of oral and written problem solving activities.
2. Members of Student Council will throughout the year produce various forms of written communication that will inform or persuade peers, faculty and administration on a variety of issues or projects that will require campus involvement.

EVALUATION:

Teacher portfolio containing video tapes and written samples of classwork in Conflict Resolution and Student Council projects.

BEAN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
3001 Ave. N
Lubbock, Texas 79405

_____ **Third Grade**
TEACHER NAME GRADE LEVEL

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL CONTRACT

OUTCOME:

Students will show growth in Language Arts through the improvement of reading comprehension and written communication.

TAAS OBJECTIVES:

Student will demonstrate elaboration in writing.

PLAN:

In order to encourage elaboration in writing, students will be using rubrics, super sentences and graphic organizers. This elaboration will be accomplished through a multidisciplinary approach. Observation of classes will be done by a specific person.

EVALUATION:

Evaluation of projects will be assessed through portfolios consisting of writing samples done by six selected students throughout the year.